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Brochures

To the Summit of Cardigan

By the Nomad

ROSEMARY PRESS BROCHURES

To the Summit of CARDIGAN

By the "NOMAD"

(Joseph Edgar Chamberlin)

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In a general way, the Nomad accepts Ruskin's maxim that "mountains are to be looked at, not from." Acceptance of that saying indicates that the mind obeys the æsthetic impulse first of all. In looking at mountains—most mountains—one sees beauty of an inspiring, an emotional sort. In looking from the summit of a mountain one sometimes indeed sees great beauty, but the impression of that beauty is overlaid by the sense of vastness, a feeling of awe, a sort of shudder at so much grandeur. The emotion excited by the scene is not one of æsthetic delight, but one of deep wonder. One goes to the mountain top for a revelation, not for simple delight, surely not for rest—and this the Nomad ventures to say in despite of Goethe, who said "Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruhe." Perhaps that was all right for Goethe; his vast mind, accustomed to be moved, found at the mountain top that sort of emotion which to him was rest. It is not so in the Nomad's case. In his lesser soul the summit rather inspires unrest.

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For that reason, perhaps, the Nomad, when he climbs the mountains, prefers the lesser heights. In their case, he is nearer to the gentle valley. Even though from the top of Mount Washington he has seen the ocean, and beheld seas upon seas of other mountains and a world full of forests, he is happier at the summit of Lafayette, whence he can view in the distance his native valley and the little lakes and the climbing pastures of Vermont. And then, again, he likes isolated heights, which somehow individualize and æstheticize the prospect. It was this liking which led him the other day to climb a mountain with which his previous acquaintance had been but casual. It was Cardigan, in western New Hampshire—a real and very beautiful mountain, seemingly of volcanic origin, which stands alone in the midst of a lovely lake country, and whose granite summit rises clean and dome-like above the rich timber that envelops its sides. And after the ascent had been made, and the wanderer's feet found themselves once more back in the valley, the Nomad was compelled to admit that the emotional experience abundantly justified the climb. For once, he would not have been content to rest with looking at the mountain, not from it.

For weeks the weather had been hazy, with a purple veil over all the hills. The Nomad had been quite content with that aspect of nature. The dog-day haze really magnifies and glorifies the mountains. By it their beautiful forms are emphasized; they are reduced to terms of line—their impression is simplified, and by that very means they answer the æsthetic craving more directly as well as more softly and gently. Looking at Cardigan across the crystal waters of Hart's Pond at Canaan Street, the Nomad did not care whether he ever climbed it or not. It completely answered the soul's demand with its lordly dome, its distinguished form, its unchallenged command of a lovely landscape. But one afternoon there came a mountain storm which shook the earth and drenched the face of nature; and next morning, when he arose, the air was as transparent as that strangely translucent atmosphere that one expects only in its perfection in the Rockies or the Sierras, and the thermometer on the porch indicated 50 degrees. Then everything in the world said, "Climb the mountain." And the Nomad went and climbed it—climbed it alone, for the sort of experience which lay before him was one that is lessened and qualified by the presence of others. When you meet God in the bush, or on the mountain top, you want no other company.

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Along with the transparent air and the cool temperature there went a fierce wind from the northwest. The Nomad noted that well in setting forth. And he had a little misgiving when, in parting from Luisita, he accepted at her hands the responsibility of taking no personal risk on the mountain. It was a promise which, in fact, he had had to make. It was a condition of the solitary journey. But as he climbed the long and rather rough path up Cardigan, he forgot the promise. The wind had only the effect, then, to make Wagnerian music in the tops of the pines and beeches. It was a divine adjunct to the climb. On the way, leaving the last pile of sawdust where the mills, near the base, had been making lumber for the great war, he entered a region of unsurpassed forest beauty. There he passed through a veritable wilderness of fir balsams—the largest trees of this fine species, the greatest pure block of them, that he had ever seen.

Across the trail up Cardigan, which is clear enough up to the timber line, the storm had thrown sundry tree trunks, which enforced many clambering detours, but these were not especially difficult. The path was lined with hobblebush (the Viburnum lantanoides), with ferns of every sort, with the pretty overhanging sprays of striped maple, with the trillium in fruit, and many other beautiful things. Most of the way the path followed the noisy brooks upward, and some of the way the brooks followed the path downward. But it was a road of enchantment, and every moment was an exaltation.

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At last the trail came squarely out of the timber, which had now shrunk to a growth of stunted spruce, and was at a visible end. Smooth granite rocks lay before the climber—undulating rocks, as it were, but quite smooth. This was the granite dome of Cardigan. Above loomed this greater dome, and at the top of all a little lesser dome, the summit of which was not a hundred yards away. The goal of the journey was at hand.

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The ascent had been up the western side of the mountain, and now, with the climber's entrance upon the open space at the summit, the westward and southward panorama was in full view. And what a view! In the foreground the townships of Orange, Canaan, Enfield, Hanover and all their lakes—Hart's pond, here called "Crystal Lake," though there is another Crystal Lake plainly visible farther south; Mascoma, and other little shining bodies of water; villages here and there; immediately to the westward, Moose mountain in Hanover, and past its slope, far but vividly clear, the Killington range in Vermont, with Killington peak and Pico sharply defined, picturesque; farther south, Ascutney's beautiful pyramid, standing solitary past the Connecticut; southward the southern Kearsarge, and farther, blue and magnificent, the divine shape of Monadnock. And is that point in the distance our own Wachusett? Manifestly it is.

But how the wind blows! It rushes over that granite dome as if its purpose was to clean it of every speck of dust, even of every projecting pebble-point—and that is what it has done in the ages. The wind rushed as if it were also its purpose to clear the mountain top of the little human excrescence that was now defying it. Going out on the dome, the Nomad felt himself losing his feet. A fierce gust made him get down on all fours! Stopping to mark the spot where he emerged from the timber, in order to find it again when he came back, the Nomad perceived that the tops of the little spruce trees simply would not be bent down. The winds of years and years seemed to have converted them into unbreakable steel. So he marked the spot with two white stones laid side by side, and pressed on.

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That is to say, he tried to press on. The wind caught him again—it was all fours for it once more. He fought his way on farther. The glistening waters of New Found Lake came into view on the east—a beautiful sheet of water, a real New Hampshire Windermere. As he looked at this lake, the Nomad was strangely impressed with the probability that if he kept on over the granite dome to the tip of the lesser dome at the summit, he would presently be blown into the waters of that lake. It might be a pleasant journey of some fifteen miles through the air with a cool watery plunge at the end—but then the Nomad's promise to Luisita came into his mind. "No risk"—that was it. The Nomad crept into the lee of a rounded rock, at the foot of which grew masses of red bear-berries, and also many more big fat blueberries than he could eat, and thought about it all. It was a clear case. You could only go to that summit on all fours, and even then you would be likely to find yourself presently creeping high in the upper air. He had to give it up. It was ignominious. Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all.

* * *

But one recourse was open. He could creep around the sides, clinging to the little spruce trees at the lower edge of the dome. He did so, observing on the way the northward-looking panorama

—Mount Cuba, toward the Connecticut, and Moosilauke, grand, gloomy and peculiar, and beautiful, graceful Lafayette, and now the looming masses of the Presidential Range. What a vision of massive grandeur! But now a precipice yawned before the climber, The way was blocked in that direction. He could only retrace his steps, feasting his eyes on the great land of the granite hills, the many-inleted lakes, and the far-stretching, billowing forests. And the big wind, never ceasing, pulling and pushing all the time, shrieking in the ears, threatening and thrilling as it threatened! It was an exalting experience, not to be left behind without regret. But after the Nomad had got back to the lee of his rock, and had eaten his lunch, there was nothing for it but to clamber back over the rocks, and descend the trail which he had climbed, and hobnob with the hobblebushes once more, and wend his way serenely over the long country road past the bleak farms of Orange back to the little lake of his holiday sojourning.

To Cardigan he will go once more one of these days. It is a mountain to love. He does not resent, by any means, the apparent inhospitality of that summit when he visited it the other day; but the next time he goes he trusts that he will not be companioned by the hurricane.

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